Coping with research: Local Tactics of Resistance against (Mis-)Representation in Academia[1]

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Abstract:

Research on fieldwork methods in Peace and Conflict Studies has often tended to examine the tools through which researchers can more easily access information about and from their 'local subjects'. This paper, however, takes into account the ways in which people in conflict/post-conflict societies deal with and resist researchers when they conduct fieldwork. With particular reference to Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Basque Country, the paper casts light on the mechanisms the researched upon invent and develop to protect themselves from being misrepresented and/or over-researched. The tactics deployed by a variety of actors in deeply-divided societies can be considered complex and subtle in that they often draw on hidden transcripts and parallel narratives. The divergences between formal and informal narratives in turn shed light on the agency of the research subjects to frame the ways in which knowledge is produced and represented. At the same time, this calls into question the abilities of researchers to authentically represent local voices unless research is conducted in a self-reflective and critical manner. Against this background, the paper explores ways of conducting fieldwork in ethically responsible ways, which are expected to benefit both researchers and research subjects.

Key words: fieldwork, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Basque Country, methodology, research frameworks

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It is only when this hidden transcript is openly declared that subordinates can fully recognize the full extent to which their claims, their dreams, their anger is shared by other subordinates with whom they have not been in direct touch.[3]

Introduction

In the research of conflict, peace and development, fieldwork has become an indispensable element of data gathering. It has become commonly accepted that it is not only important to theorise those subject matters on an abstract, theoretical level, but also to explore their lived realities, their main stakeholders, institutions and agents. There have been debates about issues of researcher positionality,[4] the problems associated with the assumed legitimacy of Western expertise over local knowledge[5] as well as notions of "othering" and subalterity implicated in the power relations of the research process.[6] Although those topics have successfully entered the debate, there still seems to be an underlying assumption that research subjects are passive, reproducing knowledge 'out there' and delivering for the purposes of research. This is in line with Said's idea of a 'process of conversion' during the course of which cultures (including research cultures) are used to transform other cultures in the interest of the receiver.[7] An instrumental perspective on fieldwork, however, fails to account for the active and transformative roles research subjects play in the process of field research. Their subtle tactics of resisting and impacting upon research has long been overlooked Yet, acknowledging the mechanisms of interaction in the research process allows for a more ethically responsible framing of fieldwork methodologies. This in turn will enhance the quality of research as well as longer-term engagement in the field.

The examples the article resorts to are mainly drawn from the peacebuilding context in Bosnia-Herzegovina[8] as well as the Basque Country, where I have conducted fieldwork. The article will particularly shed light on issues related to the fact that Bosnia can be considered as an 'overresearched case', flooded with international researchers who try to

[3] James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
[4] H. Richard Milner IV, 'Race, Culture, and Researcher Positionality: Working Through Dangers Seen, Unseen, and Unforeseen' *Educational Researcher* 36, 7 (2007): 388-400.
[5] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[6] Kim V. L. England, 'Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research' *The Professional Geographer* 46, 1 (1994): 241-256.
[7] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003) 67.
[8] From here on referred to as Bosnia or BiH.

make sense of the complex and protracted peace- and statebuilding process. These dynamics create problems of sustainability as well as accountability vis-à-vis local communities. The Basque Country can be regarded as a relevant case due to the sensitivities involved in the public discourse on the ways in which issues of peace and conflict are dealt with.

Against this background, the paper will first examine a number of ethical and methodological pitfalls fieldwork yields, before going on to outline the tactics through which research subjects may resist and respond to research on their own terms. The article concludes with the implications this bears for sustainable research. While by no means viewing this paper as prescriptive or as a set of universal research standards, I hope to engage in a debate that accounts for the complexities of fieldwork as well as the ways in which academics can make their research processes inclusive to the communities they are involved in. This requires a re-examination of our research infrastructures in the light of the multiple agents involved in them, which this paper aspires to investigate. The article should not be read as a typology of the Western researcher as there is a danger of over-generalisation and –categorisation. Instead, it aims to point to the challenges which a number of researchers engaged in fieldwork have encountered. I am aware of the anecdotal nature of this article, which some may criticise. However, writing about corruption and calling for a consideration of anecdotal data as crucial to research, Peterson has pointed out that its larger socio-political dynamics can often only be grasped in anecdotal form.[9] In that sense, clusters of anecdotes can be considered as key experiences during fieldwork as they represent the basis on which understandings and theories emerge. This is the way in which this paper has emerged, i.e. through an accumulation of field-related anecdotes, which have pointed to recurrent flaws in fieldwork methodologies as well as to the ways in which research subjects deal with those.

Fieldwork: Pitfalls, Challenges and Issues

Researchers engaged in fieldwork in highly-researched areas face a number of challenges and problems. A pressing problem is the fact that they tend to be all but popular. In BiH, I often heard people complain about the high number of researchers who would come to visit the capital city for a few days, would then take off again and write a paper or book explaining the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In fact, a number of high-impact and indeed

[9] Kristin Peterson, 37-51,'Phantom Epistemologies', in *Fieldwork is not what it used to be*, ed. James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus (New York: Cornell, 2009).

sophisticated publications related to the social aspects of peacebuilding in BiH reflect limited amounts of fieldwork.[10] In this context, Bosnians would often point out that researchers were not really interested in engaging with people's suffering and trauma beyond what could be comfortably researched (in a hotel room in the capital). This can be seen in analogy to Terray's notion of governing elites being situated in an imaginary air-conditioned room, while ordinary people are outside the system – on the veranda, figuratively speaking.[11] It parallels, to a certain extent, the tendency of researchers to situate themselves in the 'air-conditioned rooms' of the academic community, while 'going out' on the veranda to conduct field research. Researchers seem to have the reputation of being more interested in promoting their careers as efficiently as possible rather than reflecting a genuine interest in those on whose voices they base their promotions. This is linked to what Marcus terms "a game of double-ness, or fancifully, double agent-cy", i.e.the production of research viewed as based on separate registers of and a distinction between the researcher and its subjects.[12] However, rather than blaming individual researchers the use of separate registers, we need to think more fundamentally about the research infrastructures we are situated in on a systemic level. The represents a major challenge given that most researchers do not tend to highlight issues arising in the field in their publications. Instead, sources for insensitive field research can mostly be found in the field, in oral form as research subjects have hardly ever published their critiques of research methodologies.

Linda T. Smith has framed this structural issue through a more fundamental critique of the Western way of conducting research.[13] She points to the colonial structures present in research frameworks and describes them as 'linked to European imperialism and colonialism'.[14] In that sense, we can be said to build our approaches to research on frameworks derived from asymmetrical power structures and fail to give an equal standing to those researched upon. Instead, we tend to assume that we are capable of adequately

[10] Some examples, which provide sophisticated analyses of peacebuilding, yet base their research on a engagement with fellow academics rather than the complexity of interaction with local voices are David Last, "Organizing for Effective Peaebuilding", *International Peacekeeping* 7, 1 (2000): 80-96; Richard Caplan, "International Authority and State Building: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Global Governance*, vol.10, no.1, 2004, pp.53-65; Kristoffer Lidén, 'Building Peace between Global and Local Politics: The Cosmopolitical Ethics of Liberal Peacebuilding', *International Peacekeeping* 16, 5 (2009): 616-634; Menkhaus, Kai, "Impact Assessment in Post– Conflict Peacebuilding. Challenges and Future Directions", interpeace, 2004, http://pdf2.hegoa.efaber.net/entry/content/643/3_Impact_Assessment_in.pdf (acccessed 12/05/11).
[11] Emmanuel Terray, 'Le climatiseur et la veranda', in *Afrique plurielle, Afrique actuelle: Hommage à Georges Balandier*, ed.G. Balandier (Paris: Karthala, 1986).
[12] George E. Marcus, 1-34,'Introduction', in *Fieldwork is not what it used to be,* 24, ed. James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus (New York: Cornell, 2009).
[13] Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).
[14] Ibid., 1.

representing and speaking on behalf of the 'subaltern'.[15] This can be seen as an attempt to discipline those we are researching 'through exclusion, marginalization and denial'.[16] On a general level, this concerns the research frameworks we are using to label the 'other' or the 'unknown'. Smith suggests that 'the Western academy (…) has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorized'.[17] As researchers, we assume that we have the discursive authority that puts us in the position to legitimately represent what we are exploring and investigating. We claim to be able to oversee and frame the complexities that are external to us. Yet, this is not just the case on a conceptual, but also on a methodological level.

In fact, the bulk of the literature on fieldwork methodologies has not been so much concerned about the production of *legitimate* knowledge, i.e. knowledge which reflects on its accountability vis-à-vis its research subjects. Although there is no way of being legitimate in the eyes of the research subjects in their totality, the question as to whether knowledge aims to connect to the lived experiences in the field does not seem to be prominent in all field-based research. Although this has changed to a certain extent with the critical influence of anthropological literature on Peace and Conflict Studies, there has been more concern about the ways in which research can be made most efficient to the researcher as the principal agent of the research process. Armakolas, for instance and maybe not illegitimately, emphasises a set of problems that first-time researchers in BiH are likely to encounter.[18] This includes issues such as access to networks and specific areas,[19] problems with the establishment of personal relations in the field as well as the way in which a researcher positions himself/herself in relation to the research subjects.[20] Those claims are certainly valid and need to be investigated. Yet they should be used not only to serve the agenda of the researcher, but also – or mainly - to respond to the subjective needs of the research subjects.

[15] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 271-313, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 271-313, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Macmillan Education: Basingstoke, 1988).
[16] Smith, 68.
[17] Smith, 29.
[18] Ioannis Armakolas, 'A Field Trip to Bosnia: The Dilemmas of the First-Time Researcher', 165-183, in *Researching violently divided societies: ethical and methodological issues*, 165-183, ed. Marie Smyth and Gillian Robinson (Tokyo: United Nations University Press; London: Pluto Press, 2001).
[19] Ibid., 167.
[20] Ibid., 168.

There is in fact a tendency to consider the researched as objects rather than subjects with needs.[21] It is not rare that researchers (unintentionally) open up Pandora's box, possibly psychological distress, when interviewing people on sensitive issues. Sometimes researchers may not even be aware of how their research impacts on people and which effects their questions may trigger.[22] The creation of psychological distress is not necessarily intentional, but often we are not situated in the research context that would allow us to gain a deep understanding of the issues and subjectivities at stake. I have personally experienced several conferences held in BiH during the course of which individual researchers – and not even junior researchers – started confronting local participants with the war in rather insensitive ways and would not stop pushing for an answer until local participants felt either very uncomfortable or would decide to leave the conference. In many cases, researchers who are unable or unwilling to spend enough time to engage with the context in which they are researching do not have a natural feeling for the emotional and intellectual boundaries that one cannot transgress in deeply divided societies. There is indeed often a lack of awareness of the traumas involved as well as the issues that people are unwilling to address in any public context.

This is related to our focus on 'public knowledge', i.e. on what is visible and graspable in public discourses. Although feminist approaches, amongst others, have alerted us to the dangers of omitting the private dimensions of knowledge[23], this does not seem to have translated thoroughly into the ways in which research methodologies are framed. As researchers trained in fields such as Politics or International Relations, we are trained to look at what is publicly available or what can be discussed in public spaces. The *agora* seems so deeply engrained in our disciplinary mindset that we are keen to locate our research interests in those public spheres, no matter how harmful this may appear to our subjects. At the same time, a prototype researcher based in a Western university is usually required to spend most of his or her time on campus, working in English as well as applying for grants in a specific kind of professionalised and technical language. Against this background, we are used to making sense of things through the perspective of the frames we are trained in, and often fail to perceive the more subtle and hidden tones in the field, or what James Scott has termed the

[21] Marie Smyth, 'Introduction', 1-11, in *Researching violently divided societies: ethical and methodological issues*, 5, ed. Marie Smyth and Gillian Robinson (Tokyo: United Nations University Press; London: Pluto Press, 2001).
[22] Cf. Ibid., 5.
[23] Cf. Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards (eds.), *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research. Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 1998).

'hidden transcripts'.[24] We are so used to engaging in a public community (the 'research community') that it may appear odd to engage in what seems coded, private or personal. We are trained to prefer, and we sometimes do prefer what is ordered, i.e. what we can analyse through our pre-devised theoretical frameworks. There is indeed a debate about the question as to whether academics should develop theoretical frameworks before entering the field, or whether field experiences should shape the ways in which frameworks are developed.[25] This ties in with Lene Hansen's call for scholars to engage in what she calls '"real world' research questions'[26] in terms of linking the theoretical aspects of scholarship to their practical implications to the world, and vice versa.[27]

The question on the extent to which practice – as collective in character - should inform theory has also been debated heavily in Development Studies. The degree to which knowledge should be participatory in nature, to enable local subjects to impact upon the research agenda,[28] or whether this allows for local cooptation,[29] is heavily contested indeed. Participatory research still seems to scare many researchers, given that those approaches endanger the research project which has been framed so neatly beforeIt can be argued that we are trying to make discourses and observations compatible with our frames. Inconclusive research seems less acceptable in the disciplines of International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies than in Anthropology.[30] This means that we expect to find agency in certain spaces and locales more than in others, which may mean that we read political agency into communities and/or events which may not be political but rather routines.[31] This is not to blame the research community in general terms (the argument indeed contains quite a bit of criticism of my own research), but to show how the pressures of our research frameworks

[24] James Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 15, 86.
[25] See, for instance, David Mosse, 'Authority, Gender and Knowledge: Theoretical Reflections on the Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal' *Development and Change* 25, 3 (1994): 497-526.
[26] Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice. Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.
[27] For an in-depth debate on the nexus between theory and practice, see Philippe Beaulieu-Brossard, 'How international relations Co-constitute International Relations (IR)? Methodology and Methods for a Theory-Practice Inquiry', paper presented at the British International Studies Association and International Studies Association Joint International Conference (BISA-ISA), Edinburgh, 21/06/2012.
[28] Cf. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, (London: Zed Books, 2001); Pauline Peters, '"Who's Local Here?" The Politics of Participation in Development' *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 20, 3 (1996) and Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan, *Participation: from Tyranny to Transformation?: Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*, (London: Zed Books, 2004).
[29] Cooke and Kothari, op. cit.
[30] George E. Marcus, 1-34,'Introduction', in *Fieldwork is not what it used to be*, 28, ed. James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus (New York: Cornell, 2009).
[31] Many thanks to Roger Mac Ginty for reminding me of this aspect.

shape our findings. We may have to follow a project plan, to justify funding, to fill a theoretical framework with meaning and so forth. At the same time, this problem is not an unknown. Brown, for instance, has pointed out that we tend to read resistance and political agency into the everyday.[32] Mac Ginty agrees, arguing that "non-participation is often misinterpreted as resistance to, or compliance with, the liberal peace."[33] In that sense, we may see political meaning in what is merely everyday routine. I myself have made the claim that a number of cultural actors in Bosnia-Herzegovina are implicitly political.[34] While this can be proven to a higher or lesser extent in a number of cases, in other ones this is based on my personal readings of the activities of the actor in question, thus risking misrepresenting the research subjects. This in turn casts light on the responsibility of the researcher, as it is possible that manifestations of resistance become a rhetorical tool for researchers who reconstitute everyday survival strategies as "subtle forms of subaltern rebellion."[35] Brown points out that what we perceive as political agency may in fact only represent the 'personal' and thus play a different role to the one we ascribe to it.[36] To quote just one example, again from the Bosnian context: in Sarajevo there is an interreligious choir, bringing together a number of semi-professional and professional singers to perform an interreligious set of music. While this may be perceived as highly political in the religiously and ethnically divided public space in BiH, one could also argue that the singers mainly come together to perfect their repertoire rather than to engage in a political debate. At this stage, I would not want to argue that we should never investigate the political aspects of the personal –the political and the personal can never be clearly separated from one another – but to warn us of the risk of reading our own agendas into our observations. In this context, the claim that the above-mentioned choir is political must be backed up with its wider mission, which indeed contains subtle and political statements. To quote but one example, in relation to the wider mission of reconciliation the choir embodies, the conductor stated that

> [i]t will take a long time. Especially since we have noticed the fact, that in the broader sense, not just in Bosnia-Herzegovina, people will have to relearn not to fear the different and unknown. (…) Anyone who starts thinking differently because of our music we consider another stone in the spiritual bridge to the other bank.[37]

[32] Michael F. Brown, 'On Resisting Resistance' *American Anthropologist* 98, 4 (1996): 729-735, 729.
[33] Roger Mac Ginty, 'Between Resistance and Compliance: Non-participation and the Liberal Peace', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 6, 2 (2012): 167-187, 167.
[34] Kappler, Stefanie, "Everyday legitimacy in post-conflict spaces: The creation of social legitimacy in Bosnia-Herzegovina's cultural arenas", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, forthcoming.
[35] Brown, 729.
[36] Brown, 731.
[37] Josip Katavić in Namik Kabil, *Vjernici*, documentary, Sarajevo, 2008.

It may seem as if researchers have the authority (and possibly even the monopoly) to (mis-)represent local populations as they give them a voice and frame it on the terms of their research agenda. Yet research subjects do not necessarily accept research being conducted on them. Rather can we observe the emergence of a variety of strategies of resistance against research that frames its subjects as passive and voiceless. The following section will outline a number of those strategies.

Resisting Research

Reflecting the interaction between local and international actors, Tsing's work on the role of 'friction' in research has raised important questions about 'zones of cultural frictions' in a puzzle of global connectedness and its associated encounters and interactions.[38] Tsing outlines the centrality of "zones of awkward engagement" in the ways in which frictions develop in the varying languages people use across divides and the meanings developed therein.[39] We can thus read zones of research engagement as the spheres in which emerging struggles, frictions and resistance develop in multidimensional ways.

In this context, resistance as a topic in Peace and Conflict Studies has tended to focus on local actors' responses to peacebuilding policies. However, the agency of our research subjects has often been framed as dangerous, conflictive and even undermining research endeavours instead of providing new insights.[40] This approach has neglected the constructive role that the research subjects can play in the design of our research projects. At the same time, the ways in which 'research subjects' question and enhance the methodologies through which they are investigated have hardly been conceptualised. This is often linked to the assumption that we, as researchers, are outside relations of power and domination, suggesting that we use less patronising practices than practitioners in the field. This is an assumption this article challenges, looking at the ways in which we become complicit with power relations in our 'zones of awkward engagement' as well as how local subjects respond to our biases. In fact, in many cases will people have developed strategies for coping with researchers whom they feel misrepresented by.

[38] Anna L. Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), xi.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Raymond M. Lee, *Dangerous Fieldwork* (Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: SAGE, 1995).

In this context, de Certeau has outlined the importance of focusing on everyday life tactics as forms of 'antidiscipline', based on the creativity of those researched on.[41] Conceptualising tactics as "an art of the weak"[42], de Certeau points to the mechanisms through which the allegedly powerless reclaim their voices in subtle ways. Not only can peacebuilding be considered as an arena in which a diverse set of actors make their voices heard through a variety of tactics,[43] but the same holds true for the research field. The latter can be considered as a discursive zone or space in which both researchers and their subjects interact, impact upon and resist each other strategically. In this respect, de Certeau frames space (and this can be read as the research space) as "the relationship between the frontier and the bridge, that is, between a (legitimate) space and its (alien) exteriority".[44] From the perspective of the research subjects, this points to the contested legitimacy of the academic field as an 'alien exteriority' and the ways in which it is challenged by a multiplicity of local alternative spaces and their associated discourses. In that respect, the legitimacy of the research field can be seen as under constant challenge with respect to its legitimacy among its subjects. Josephides points to the possibilities and limitations that those various tactics have due to their resistive potential in time and space.[45] Against this background, we need to focus on the contested forms of legitimacy and the associated claims to subjectively legitimate knowledge in order to understand the politicised nature of research. In that respect, rather than taking research for granted, we need to understand the subtle ways in which research discourses develop, both locally and on a broader scale. This can be directly visible in terms of people attempting to directly make their voices heard in research agendas and outputs. On the other hand, those tactics can be more subtle in nature, challenging the legitimacy of the methodologies of enquiry in coded terms. Again, this is linked to the social codes developing in everyday life contexts.[46] Only when we develop a critical awareness of those narratives can we make sense of the political and contested nature of our work.

Local resistance to international researchers may start at an early stage of the research process. On the one hand, potential interviewees may bluntly state that they have no interest in the research project or in being interviewed for it. On the other hand, an issue that most

[41] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiv, xv.
[42] Ibid., 37.
[43] Stefanie Kappler, "'Mysterious in content': The European Union Peacebuilding Framework and Local Spaces of Agency in Bosnia-Herzegovina", PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, September 2011.
[44] De Certeau, 126.
[45] Lisette Josephides, 'Disengagement and Desire: The Tactics of Everyday Life' *American Ethnologis*, 26, 1 (1999): 139-159, 152.
[46] Cf. James Scott, op. cit.

academics who have conducted fieldwork are familiar with is the problem of failing to receive responses from the people they plan to talk to. Due to the heavy density of academics in BiH specifically, it is indeed very difficult to find interviewees if going through what is currently the most common channel of communication, i.e. email enquiries. Particularly if phrasing their enquiries in an English-language standard jargon, academics are highly unlikely to receive an enthusiastic response. In Bosnia, one way of resisting being over-researched – and thus often misrepresented – is to ignore researchers. Indeed, the latter are sometimes perceived as intrusive and lacking sensitivity, so local people tend to try to avoid engaging with the academic community.[47] Although not responding to emails or phone enquiries may seem like a 'non-strategy'[48] or one of 'non-participation'[49], this can equally represent a deliberate strategy of resistance. In fact, a researcher who is unable to find interviewees may encounter limits in terms of research outputs as well as failing to acquire an in-depth understanding of the context under investigation. We, as members of the research community, sometimes forget how dependent we are on the research subjects if we are to investigate our research questions. In that sense, no engagement on the part of local actors should send a strong signal and make us rethink our ways of approaching them.

At the same time, tactics of resistance to research can also be more obvious. Smith, for instance, points to the counter stories produced by local actors as forms of resistance to the 'mainstream stories' narrated by the majority of researchers.[50] A telling example is the artist group Ambrosia, based in Sarajevo, whose members have decided to refrain from reproducing mainstream (read: NGO-like) discourses, but rather to engage in social life as 'crazy artists.'[51] They deliberately aim to deconstruct everything which is mainstream by not engaging in standardised funding schemes, while their art productions are not amenable to standardised, donor-directed discourses. As a result, the members of Ambrosia communicate with researchers through a different language as well.[52]

In a similar vein, our interviewees may decide to only talk about parts of certain stories, or to convey a modified story to us. This may be a deliberate strategy of showing

[47] Confidential source, personal conversation, 04 May 2011.
[48] Cf. Andy Thornley and Yvonne Rydin, *Planning in a Global Era* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002), 14.
[49] Cf. Roger Mac Ginty, 'Between Resistance and Compliance: Non-participation and the Liberal Peace', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 6, 2 (2012): 167-187.
[50] Smith, 2.
[51] Nebojša Savija-Valha, Ambrosia, Personal Interview, Sarajevo, 23/03/2010.
[52] BHT TV, TV programme on Ambrosia, Sarajevo, 26/08/2009 and Šavija-Valha, Nebojša, Ambrosia, *Personal Interview*, Sarajevo, 23/03/2010.

one's dissatisfaction with specific researchers or their projects. It can also be a way of reinforcing one's position and voice in the public sphere. In this context, Cooke and Kothari outline how participatory techniques in development research can be considered sites of contested power struggles in which the more powerful actors are put in the position to act as tyrants in terms of dictating the rules of empowerment and development.[53] They argue, on the one hand, that participation may be a necessary tool to engage with communities, but on the other hand, it can "both conceal and reinforce oppressions and injustices in their various manifestations".[54] Mosse agrees, pointing to the influence of socially dominant groups to present their personal interests as communal needs.[55] At this point, I am not arguing that this is illegitimate, but rather pointing to the diverse strategies interviewees may resort to in order to protect or convey their interests vis-à-vis academics. The modification and/or manipulation of accounts, narratives, stories and needs can be considered one out of many strategies available to our research subjects. Robben frames this as 'rhetorical seduction', a strategy through which key actors in a (post-) conflict scenario try to convince researchers to adopt their positions.[56] An interview with an EU-funded NGO reflected this rather well. While many rural communities in post-war Bosnia are divided or ethnically homogenised, the interviewee painted a rather romantic image of the common cultural heritage of those villages – in line with the EU's funding priorities and guidelines.[57] This is certainly not a lie, but at the same time leaves out the contested and politicised nature of rural life in contemporary Bosnia, while narrating the example in a rather romantic way for the instrumental purposes of the NGO itself. Again, this is not to challenge the legitimacy of those attempts as they can give interesting insights into the subjectivities of post-conflict reconstruction if they are reflected critically. Yet, this strategy points to the agency of the researched to impact upon the ways in which their stories are narrated. The final outputs are thus not only dependent on the researcher and his or her methodologies, but also on the respective interviewees as well as their ways of narrating and contextualising.

[53] Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London: Zed Books, 2001).
[54] Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, 'The Case for Participation as Tyranny', 1-15, in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, 13, ed. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001).
[55] David Mosse, '"People's Knowledge", Participation and Patronage: Operations and Representations in Rural Development', 16-35, in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, 21, ed. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001).
[56] Antonius C. G. M. Robben, 'The Politics of Truth and Emotion among victims and perpetrators of violence', 81-103, in *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, 81-103, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1995).
[57] Confidential source, *Personal Interview*, Sarajevo, 24/03/2010.

Another strategy of resisting research on the part of the interviewees is to 'code' information. Assuming the researcher does not speak the local language, interviewees may refer to certain events in their local language. In most cases, interviewers will feel too embarrassed to ask for clarification. I remember an incident during a research visit to the Basque Country during the course of which one of my interlocutors started speaking Basque. As I did not speak the language, other people in the room then helped me interpret what the interviewee said. But at the same time, many precious details were 'lost in translation'. In another interview I was conducting in Banja Luka, the capital of Republika Srpska, the secretary of the interviewee had offered to interpret.[58] At that stage, I had been learning Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, but was by no means fluent. However, the interviewee decided my language skills were good enough for the secretary to leave the room. Again, I was unable to pick up on the nuances of the narratives I was confronted with. It would be stretched too far to argue that this was a clear and deliberate act of resistance against research on the part of the interviewee. At the same time, he made it clear that he preferred not to have his discourses re-created in English, while implying his desire to frame his ideas in his own language. This in turn may be read as a subtle response to the English-dominated research field in which local languages only play a marginal role for many practitioners and theorists.

Interviewees may also decide not to talk about certain topics or issues. Indeed, 'silence' can be a very powerful manifestation of resistance to discourses, both academically and more generally.[59] Although silence may often come across as apathy or passivity, it can actually be a meaningful tool in both the policy-world and academia. I became aware of the power of silence in the Basque Country, particularly when meeting with a NGO called 'Gesto por la Paz' (Association for Peace in the Basque Country). This NGO calls on people to gather *in silence* for 15 minutes following any death caused by manifestations of political violence of any kind.[60] The interviewee pointed out that silence was a captivating way of engaging with the issue of political violence, yet resisting the often aggressive politicised language used in common discourses.[61] Along similar lines, I have experienced deeper meanings of silence in Bosnia as well. During a conference held in Sarajevo, an international researcher asked local participants about the issue of reconciliation in the country. This topic being rather controversial and politicised in Bosnia, nobody wanted to engage in that

[58] Confidential source, *Personal Interview*, Banja Luka, 27/04/2010.
[59] Cf. Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: SIU Press, 2004).
[60] Itziar Aspuru, Gesto por la Paz, Personal Interview, Bilbao, 09/06/2008.
[61] Ibid.

discussion. The more the researcher pushed for an answer, the more the silence in the room became tangible. This was indeed a very interesting way of expressing resistance to unwanted research agendas. In terms of interviews and observations, most researchers will have experienced moments of 'awkward silence', which are quite meaningful indeed, or instances in which research subjects would not want to engage in a certain topic. This deliberate silence can tell us a lot about resistance to research and the sensitivities we may be touching on.[62] It may represent a deliberate decision on the part of the research subjects to exclude themselves from the research infrastructures that we create and that they perceive as flawed. Having said that, it is important not to over-interpret silence either. It may often not be intentional (let alone an intentional sign of resistance), but it can equally reflect a lack of interest in the conversation, or represent a response to previous traumatisation. It may also be an instinctive reaction to the researcher touching on taboos. At the same time, the reluctance to engage with researchers who lack a sensitive approach reflects a powerful statement and an important obstacle to conducting research on controversial issues and taboos.

However, what we perceive as silence or 'non-responses' to our research projects may present itself as vibrant discourse in other circles and discourse communities. Under the surface of what we see there may be more localised forms of addressing sensitive issues in alternative ways. Feldman, for instance, has outlined the importance of 'rumours' as the substance of the social and deeply rooted in culture.[63] Feldman argues that rumours tend to emerge out of silence, often as a result of collapsed official organs and institutions, thus acting as a basis of a non-verbalised counter-society.[64] In that sense, what remains underground can shed light on the real substance of local agendas as well as how they relate to our research plans – in constructive or destructive ways.

However, absorbed in the everydayness of our institutions, we are not trained to recognise the everydayness of extra-institutional discourses. Indeed, often when approaching and/or interviewing people in professional settings, they will resort to technical language, possibly reproducing the official lines of the institution/organisation they represent. I experienced that when interviewing people in Bosnia in English. In many cases, I felt I was being given donor-directed narratives, due to the fact that I came across as part of the donor

[62] Cf. also Marlene de Laine, *Fieldwork, Participation and Practice: Ethics and Dilemmas in Qualitative Research*, (London: Sage, 2000), 75ff.
[63] Allen Feldman, 'Ethnographic States of Emergency', 224-252, in *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, 235, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1995).
[64] Ibid., 224-252, 231, 234.

community. Researchers may thus be perceived as complicit with certain projects they may not feel connected to but with which they happen to share the same language or the country of origin. On the other hand, those pre-censored discourses are also to be found within international institutions. Indeed, due to an increasing number of researchers conducting fieldwork in relatively safe places such as Northern Ireland or Bosnia, international organisations have started professionalising the research process they become involved in. The World Bank and the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Bosnia, for instance, have started preparing standardised Power Point presentations for researchers visiting their institutions. In that sense, the information shared to the outside can be controlled more efficiently. To a certain extent, this prevents sensitive issues to be raised and is meant to protect the institution as a whole. At the same time, this can be read as a way of preventing research that may eventually become harmful to the respective institution.

Against this background, it becomes obvious that both local and international research subjects have a variety of strategies at their disposal through which they can impact upon the research process. Those mechanisms can be publicly visible, but they can also be very subtle. If so, academics may not even be aware of the intentionality and agency involved in certain counter-stories or moments of silence. At this point, we need to ask ourselves how we can take those dilemmas into account in order to make our research ethically acceptable to all parties involved. The following section will address this question.

Implications for ethically responsible field research

The reader may wonder about whether almost colonial practices of fieldwork do actually exist in the seemingly critical world of academia. However, although it is now not common to find and read publications reinforcing divisions between researcher and its subjects, the move to start questioning apparent truths (often incorporated in numbers and 'empirical facts') is a relatively recent one. Only in the late 1990s has Scheper-Hughes called for the use of critically interpretative approaches as radical and fundamentally different from the long-prevailing positivist-scientific methods to research.[65] This has to be seen against the background that rather influential academics such as Freilich had earlier warned of the

[65] Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 'Demography Without Numbers', 201-222, in *Demography: Toward a New Synthesis*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Thomas E. Fricke (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

dangers of going native and losing the distance between researchers and their subjects.[66] Although the issue of disciplinary reflexivity has been implicit in much of recent research and transformed the ways in which we look at our research subjects, it represents a relatively recent move and has not often been discussed beyond the discipline of Anthropology.

The fact that research has from there increasingly been called into question and faced critical scrutiny on the part of its subjects indicates the need to reflect the frameworks we are situated in. Agreeing with the importance of this task, Smith claims that '[n]egotiating and transforming institutional practices and research frameworks is as significant as the carrying out of actual research programmes.'[67] We particularly need to rethink the infrastructures that we create in the research process in terms of how to make it inclusive and interactive. In that sense, there is a need to acknowledge the fact that our research subjects are transformative in nature. They can manipulate the academic processes we are engaged in to reclaim ownership for them in subtle terms. This in turn creates new challenges for reseearchers who view such dynamics as valuable inputs into the research process.

However, instead of limiting our reflections to our personal and often limited engagement in the field, an ethically sensitive methodology calls for reflexivity at the systemic levels as well. We need to think about our personal role on the one hand, but reflexivity should also reach out to the role of our institution(s), discipline(s) and socio-cultural approaches. And while there is no recipe for the perfect way in which complex reflexivity can be embedded in the research process universally, there is a need to reveal the limits that those dimensions impose on us to our research subjects. Only if we are aware of those constraints can we start resisting them ourselves.

Resistance to research can in itself become part of our research endeavour as it represents a valid statement about our epistemologies and political and contested ways of representation. It can therefore enhance our very own position as researchers in the long run. Along the lines of 'rhetorical seduction' as outlined above, we need to critically reflect upon the persuasive tools we are confronted with.[68] Such statements may become part of our research in that they highlight the politics and subjectivities at stake in our particular case. In

[66] Morris Freilich ed., *Marginal Natives: Anthropologists at Work* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
[67] Smith, 140.
[68] Cf. Antonius C.G.M. Robben and Carolyn Nordstrom, 'The Anthropology and Ethnography of Violence and Sociopolitical Conflict', 1-23, in *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival, 16, ed.* Antonius C.G.M. Robben and Carolyn Nordstrom (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995).

that sense, strategies of resistance can be seen as reflective of underlying needs and interests, thus mirroring the political nature of conflict. Taking into account that places and spaces tend to be 'open only to a particular set of practices and to similar others,'[69] we need to find ways of engaging with what is unexpected.

As policies may emerge based on research papers, or other researchers may undertake more fieldwork based on our own findings, we need to be cautious about the nature of analysis we are engaging in. If we fail to conduct research in dialogue with our research subjects, this may mean that they will not want to engage with us or responsible others in the long term. In the Western Balkans, researchers are not very popular indeed, as a number of confidential sources have suggested to me.[70] This is not to argue against research, but to encourage a long-term view on our engagement. In that respect, we must not only focus on our narrow research agenda at the respective moment, but view it in the light of ongoing research in the country, whether this involves ourselves or fellow academics. This will not only establish a higher degree of legitimacy for our research but for the academic community as a whole. It also requires us to rethink our concrete ways of approaching our interviewees and links to the question that Naficy poses, i.e. about the sorts of conversations we need to have during our field work in order to make them productive not only for us, but also for our interlocutors.[71] This is not to say that most researchers are insensitive towards those questions. Breglia, for instance, describes how she refused to engage in a project that would have led required 'utilizing ethnography' in terms of requiring ethical compromises she was not willing to make.[72] However, there is a need to embed a concern about the productivity of knowledge for those helping to produce it in our disciplines and institutions. Knowledge should not only build a researcher's career or improve the publication output of a university, but it should yield benefits for our partners in the field.

It is important not to rely on the internet exclusively in order to identify potential interlocutors. In many cases, those actors represented on professional English-language based websites are the usual targets of international researchers and tend to be used to presenting themselves in the public academic realm. At the same time, this visibility in the public sphere can be misleading as it may not capture interesting 'underground dynamics' of social life.

[69] Doreen Massey, *for space* (London: Sage, 2005, reprinted 2007, 2008), 178.
[70] Confidential sources (mainly NGO activists from the entire region), Personal Conversations, 04 May 2011.
[71] Nahal Naficy, 'The Dracula Ballet. A Tale of Fieldwork in Politics', 113-128, in *Fieldwork is not what it used to be*, 116, ed. James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus (New York: Cornell, 2009).
[72] Lisa Breglia, 129-142,''The "Work of Ethnographic Fieldwork"', in *Fieldwork is not what it used to be*, 136, ed. James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus (New York: Cornell, 2009).

One example of this is the Duplex Gallery, a small exhibition centre in Sarajevo, now about to move to a new location, which used to be hidden to an extent, so that one could only find it if one was prepared to go and look around for it. At the same time, the space used to be a much politicised environment as it provided a platform for artists to engage in political debates in a protected environment. An internet search would not have been able to provide this information, which shows the importance of engaging in non-conventional techniques of researching the 'unknown'.[73] At the same time, this approach has the potential to benefit our research subjects as well in that it ensures a broader scope of representation and reflects the complexity (which researchers often fear due to its 'messiness') of social interaction beyond the virtual world.

Said approach also reflects the need to access networks from a variety of entry points. In fact, if a researcher decides to follow the pathways of certain networks, this may appear a straightforward strategy as it is usually helpful to be given contact details in person. In that case, one keeps being directed to people sharing the attitudes of the respective interviewee, which may undermine the perceived legitimacy of the researcher on a bigger scale and may create an impression of bias – at least from alternative perspectives. One concrete example of this is the tendency to focus on capital cities as the main loci of research. Indeed, for financial or logistical reasons, many researchers prefer to stay in the more centralised spaces, mostly in metropolitan areas. As a result, they move within specific networks of values and interaction. Although this is not necessarily problematic, it may become so if the academics in question claim to be representative of a whole country. Against this background, we have to address the question of biases and the (lack of) representation of the geographical and discursive spaces we are researching. Again, this raises wider questions for our institutional frameworks. If our responsibilities as academics at our home institution do not allow us to spend enough time in the field, we may either resist those constraints, or we will have to limit our endeavours in terms of how representative we can be.

At the same time, not only do we need to reflect about *where* we are conducting our research, but also *how* we are conducting it. There needs to be an accountability structure not only between researcher and publisher, but also between researchers and their research subjects. In that sense, participatory research techniques can support us in developing

[73] Cf. Nita Cherry and Joy Higgs, 'Researching in Wicked Practice Spaces: Artistry as a Way of Researching the Unknown in Practice', 13-22, in *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching. Living Research*, 13-22, ed. Joy Higgs, Angie Titchen, Debbie Horsfall and Donna Bridges (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011).

frameworks, as Kindon, Pain and Kesby suggest.[74] Participatory approaches clearly raise the issue of accountability and responsibility towards our research subjects, bearing dangers of co-optation and manipulation, but at the same time being unavoidable if we strive for meaningful and ethically responsible research techniques. We may be scared of returning our research results to those people as we may be scared of their responses. However, this is one of the symbolic steps to start a conversation *with*, rather than *about*, the people we research. It implies a need to engage with our current structures of publication, which often limit access to publications to fellow academics and make it difficult and expensive for our interviewees to access those publications, let alone become a part of accountable research. Open access clearly has improved this situation, with a number of my interviewees having read and commented on what I published in open sources.

Finally, we need to address the role of language. Our institutionaled jargon often prevents us from engaging in the everyday codes of social life, which are crucial if we have the ambition to engage beyond what is formalised and publicly visible. As a result we need to engage in what Mac Ginty labels an informal "grey space", in which societies may choose to locate their political and/or economic activities.[75] If we are successful in that ambition, this will situate us in a radically new position in relation to our subjects. This is a closer position – maybe thus linked to the risk of bias – but at the same time yields crucial insights in the discursive day-to-day coping mechanisms which are rich in meanings in relation to peace(building). Learning to understand those codes, however, requires a long-term engagement in the field as well as a high degree of adaptability towards local frames. At the same time, in-depth engagement promises not only to establish positive long-term relationships with the people we research, but also to stimulate new insights in the local politics of peace as well as the contested narratives surrounding it.

Conclusion

This paper has reflected the extent to which academics engaged in fieldwork are situated within an often-constrainingframework of academia, caught in the traps of multiple academics frames and structures. The latter have sometimes made it difficult to engage in

[74] Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain and Mike Kesby (eds.), *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods. Connecting People, participation and place*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).
[75] Mac Ginty, 178.

ethically responsibly research and have therefore faced ambiguous responses among the research subjects. It is hard to quantify the extent to which such approaches as problematized above have been / are dominant in contemporary research, and I have avoided numbers and percentages in this paper. This is not only the case because it would be contradicting my general scepticism vis-a-vis quantitative approaches, but it is also a result of the article's call for recognition of subjectivities, both in peacebuilding practice and in its research. The extent to which research can be considered 'locally legitimate' is certainly a matter of perspective. At the same time, what this article has outlined is a tendency of our research frameworks to lack an angle that would help us integrate its local responses into our research frameworks as those are generally expected to be coherent, logical and compatible with the requirements of our institutions and donors.

Tactics of resistance towards academics in the field have thus not remained a rarity, but have at the same time been overlooked methodologically. It is against this background that we need to take into consideration the extent to which our research subjects are not just an input to, but essential part of our endeavours. They represent the gatekeepers to research to us and thus have to be seen as capable of transforming projects in a variety of ways. Their transformative power needs to be recognised individually, socially and institutionally if we are to understand the subjective and contested narratives surrounding discourses on conflict and peace. Rather than eliminating those subjectivities, this paper suggests that those can be seen as the essential factors to representing contested community discourses in a critical and reflexive way. An awareness of the tactics of our interviewees thus supports an in-depth epistemological understanding of the politics of peace research. In that sense, it is essential that we keep in mind the wider picture of the research process, not only in the light of *what* we are researching, but also *how* we are researching it. The infrastructures created by researchers on fieldwork, in terms of inclusion and exclusion of actors, the disciplinary boundaries we establish as well as the bridges and gaps we claim to represent, need to be made explicit to shed light on the fact that research is a political process by nature, just as much as the politics of peacebuilding we often strive to critique.